DOCUMENT RESUME

ED 209 160 SO 013 718

AUTHOR Ragland, Rachel G.
TITLE Teaching Psychology at the Secondary Level: The Preparation of Textbooks and Materials.
PUB DATE Apr 81
NOTE 13p.; Paper presented at the Annual Meeting of the Eastern Psychological Association (52nd, New York, NY, April 22-25, 1981).

EDRS PRICE MF01/PC01 Plus Postage.
DESCRIPTORS Needs; Professors; *Psychology; Secondary Education; Secondary School Teachers; Student Needs; Textbook Content; *Textbook Preparation; Textbook Standards

ABSTRACT

This paper discusses the needs of high school students and teachers that writers and publishers of psychology materials and textbooks should keep in mind. To take students' needs into consideration, publishers should stress practical application and relevance of subject matter, provide opportunities for interaction with peers, aim reading materials at ninth or tenth grade reading levels, emphasize a study skills orientation, and consider the maturity level of students. The needs of teachers include an emphasis on teachability of materials, clear objectives, adherence to sound psychological principles, appropriateness of topics covered, and teaching techniques and activity suggestions. In addition to student and teacher needs, there are other constraints to be kept in mind, such as budget, limited subject matter background of teachers, time constraints, community censorship, level of students' ability, and lack of communication among teachers. In terms of satisfying the needs of students and teachers working within these constraints, several major problems exist in currently available materials. The primary problem is that authorship of texts and supplementary materials is still, for the most part, at the college level. Professors lack the experience of teaching at the secondary level which is essential for creating effective materials. The fact that college level writers are often not aware of the specific needs of high school students and teachers is also evident in the reviews they do on the currently available resources. Many teachers use these as a basis for text selection. (Author/RM)

****
* Reproductions supplied by EDRS are the best that can be made *
* from the original document. *
****

U.S. DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
NATIONAL INSTITUTE OF EDUCATION
EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)

X This document has been reproduced as received from the person or organization originating it.
Minor changes have been made to improve reproduction quality.

- Points of view or opinions stated in this document do not necessarily represent official NIE position or policy.

"PERMISSION TO REPRODUCE THIS MATERIAL HAS BEEN GRANTED BY
Rachel G. Ragland

TO THE EDUCATIONAL RESOURCES INFORMATION CENTER (ERIC)."

ED209160

TEACHING PSYCHOLOGY AT THE SECONDARY LEVEL:

The Preparation of Textbooks and Materials

presented at

Eastern Psychological Association

(52nd Annual Meeting, New York, NY, April 22-25, 1981)

by

Rachel G. Ragland

Norwalk High School
Norwalk, Conn

SP 013 718

ABSTRACT

The teaching of psychology at the secondary level has been an expanding field since the early 1960's when less than 10% of secondary schools offered such study. Today an estimated one-half to three-quarters of a million students take this important and relevant discipline. Textbooks and materials for this specific population of students are currently being produced in increasing numbers. The following discussion will focus on the specialized needs of both students and teachers for materials at the high school level and the limitations faced in satisfying these needs. The student needs include a stress on practical application and relevance of subject matter, opportunity for interaction with peers, limited reading level, study skills orientation and maturity level of students. The needs of teachers include an emphasis on teachability of materials, clear objectives, adherence to sound psychological principles, appropriateness of topics covered and teaching techniques and activity suggestions. Constraints of the secondary level to be considered include budget, limited subject-matter background of teachers, time constraints, community "censorship", level of students' ability and lack of communication between teachers. Problems with current materials and recommendations for evaluating and choosing textbooks and materials will be presented.

The teaching of psychology at the secondary level has been an expanding field since the early 1960's when less than 10% of secondary schools offered such study. Today an estimated one-half to three-quarters of a million students take this important and relevant discipline.[1] Textbooks and materials for this specific population of students are currently being produced in increasing numbers. The following discussion will focus on the specialized needs of both students and teachers for materials at the high school level and the limitations faced in satisfying these needs. Problems with current materials and recommendations for evaluating and choosing textbooks and materials will be presented.

The needs of high school pupils are in many cases different from those of students at other levels of study. Students at any level need to develop background in theory and fact in various areas of psychology, and clear explanations of concepts need to be provided. This is true at the secondary level as well. However, practical applications to the lives of students are critically important for the high school age pupil. The concepts presented need to be explained in terms of the students' own lives and range of experience. For example, discussing classical conditioning in terms of the behaviors found in their pets at home will bring increased understanding of this important concept. A discussion of laboratory experiments should be included but the students will respond and identify more closely with activities they have experienced themselves. A dog being "conditioned" to run to the kitchen when an electric can opener is being used is a practical

and useful way of facilitating true understanding of what otherwise may be a difficult and abstract concept. Relating conditioning to areas of student interest such as TV advertising or "brainwashing" is also helpful.

Relevance is an important key to teaching at the secondary level, and this is particularly true in the field of psychology. Students often take psychology courses seeking self-understanding and a measure of self-analysis through this study. A recent survey by the Psychology Special Interest Group of the National Council for the Social Studies reported that from 51.7% to 61.1% of students surveyed responded that understanding and dealing with personal problems was their main reason for enrolling in psychology courses. Textbooks and materials used should provide opportunities for satisfying these desires on the part of the student. For example, the author's textbook Invitation to Psychology (Scott, Foresman, 1981) includes activities in each chapter entitled "It's Your Turn" which ask the student to provide an example from their own life or experience to illustrate a concept just presented in the text. By way of illustration, after a discussion of sensory adaptation the experience of walking into a dark movie theater is discussed. At another point students are asked to keep, and then evaluate, a record of their dreams for one week. These are areas students often feel are relevant to their quest for self-analysis.

In addition, interaction with peers as well as teachers is important to the development of the secondary school student. Psychology can provide

an excellent growth opportunity in this area if the prepared materials are suitable. Experiments and simulations coordinated with content can be particularly good. In the field of social psychology, for example, group processes can be studied by placing the students in a group situation, such as cooperative problem-solving. The mechanisms of the group can be studied from within, as well as providing an opportunity for peer interaction.

Additionally, the reading level of the textbooks and supplementary materials is especially important at the high school. Students' reading abilities vary greatly, in general, but even more so in high school. Studies have indicated that reading materials should be aimed at a ninth or tenth grade reading level, particularly since vocabulary load is usually high. Vocabulary lists, in-context definitions and glossaries are also useful. Lofty, high level writing styles may be counter-productive. High school students may be put off because they are not yet ready for such an approach.

In addition to appropriate readability, a strongly study-skills-oriented program is essential for teaching at the secondary level. Structure of chapters should be straight forward and easy to handle. Preview and review questions should be provided in each section to direct the students' reading and help make it more efficient.

Finally, the maturity level of the students needs to be taken into consideration. This is particularly true in the area of content load and level of explanation of concepts. Over ambitious or over-simplified materials will not be useful. Teachers experienced at the secondary level of instruction

are often better able to develop materials which efficiently meet these student needs in many cases than those experienced only at more advanced levels.

In developing materials and textbooks for the high school teaching of psychology, the needs of the instructor must also be considered. The most important concern is that the material be teachable. The amount of material included in a book (or chapter, or section thereof) or supplementary materials must be appropriate to the time constraints and other needs of teachers. Structure needs to be provided to guide teachers in preparing lessons. Features such as numbered sections and review questions are helpful in this regard. Deciding what material should be included and what eliminated is also important to teachers at this level trying to create a viable course offering. Materials prepared by people with experience at the secondary level, rather that the collegiate level, can bring this appropriate structure to the vast amount of subject matter in this field.

Clear objectives need to be kept in mind while maintaining academically sound principles. Surveys of the field in recent years have indicated what topics are generally stressed by secondary teachers and what goals they set for their programs. These need to be thoroughly studied and taken into careful consideration when preparing textbooks and materials for use at this level. However, sound psychological principles need to be maintained as well. No factual errors can be permitted, particularly in trying to simplify material to the high school level. Many secondary teachers lack the background to judge this for themselves and could unwittingly misinform

students. The choice of topics covered must also be appropriate to the high school level. The amount of space devoted to individual topics within a text, for example, should reflect the readers' level. By way of illustration a thorough section on "Psychology at Work" (careers in and diversity of the field of psychology) may be needed at the high school level but be unwanted at the collegiate level.

High school instructors also require that appropriate teaching techniques and activity suggestions be provided with materials. Many teachers, transferred from other social studies disciplines, lack the background to develop their own materials in this area. In addition, the success of high school teaching is very dependent upon an activity-oriented style and much diversity of technique. This is not the case at the college level. Inclusion of skills building activities (such as reading, writing and study skills) is also important. This is a factor often overlooked by authors experienced in writing for college level students.

The constraints of working at the high school level must also be considered when producing materials and textbooks in this field. The availability of resources and budget may often be the first concern. A textbook will be used for many years, by many different students at a high school. All materials should be together in one source and should be reusable. Supplementary materials should coordinate well with the text for efficient, economical use.

In addition, numerous studies have shown that many instructors have a limited background in the subject area. They are often primarily teachers of other disciplines, frequently history or science, who are given the assignment of preparing and teaching a psychology course. Materials and books must take this into account. What is often desired by these teachers is a "cookbook" approach where the structure of a book provides a convenient and successful structure for their course. Ditto masters of activities, worksheets and tests, coordinated with the text, are most welcome. A strong teacher's guide is also essential. It should include detailed, guided lesson plans for each area of study. These lesson plans must take into account the limited facilities and resources available at the high school level. Creativity, ingenuity and flexibility are often the keys to success.

Special time constraints of courses, must also be considered. Surveys show most courses are limited to one semester, necessitating a careful choice of topics in order to present a balanced view of the vast field. At the secondary level all topics must be covered and reinforced in class, not merely assigned for reading with the assumption that the material will be read and understood, as is often the case at the college level.

The sensitive nature of much of the subject matter of human behavior must be recognized at the high school level. Parental input, community standards and Board of Education restrictions and policies often affect the adoption of textbooks and materials. The problem of differences in

regional and state by state standards must also be addressed when creating materials for nationwide distribution. Texts need to cover all possibilities, yet be sensitive to areas of regional or local concern. Such "censorship" issues are not often a concern in most college level book selections.

Another constraint to be kept in mind when working at the high school level is the ability level of the students. This is generally lower than college level, and often is one of the major adjustments necessary when moving from the collegiate to secondary level. Teacher expectations often need to be reevaluated. Classes are usually heterogeneous, as well, which creates additional problems. Books and materials need to be able to accomodate a range of abilities in the same program. In addition, students in high school psychology have different plans for the future and different reasons for choosing this subject. An effort should be made to fulfill all goals. Another important element of which to be aware is the level of thinking on which most students are functioning. Most have little interpretive skills and function primarily on the literal level. Texts and other materials should recognize this, while at the same time providing activities to encourage and strengthen the interpretive thought process.

Finally, because of the elective nature of most psychology programs teachers of this subject often find themselves isolated in their schools, the only one teaching this course. There is a lack of communcation and

sharing of ideas. In addition to this lack of communication many teachers lack the background in their own education to create these ideas, as has been discussed. This is why materials providing a wealth of ideas and activities are genuinely needed at this level.

In terms of satisfying the needs of students and teachers at the secondary level and working within the constraints just discussed several major problems exist in most currently available materials. The primary problem is that authorship of texts and supplementary materials is still, for the most part, at the college level. Most writers working at this level are not aware of the constraints and needs outlined above. They lack the experience of teaching at this level which is essential for creating effective materials.

The fact that college level writers are often not aware of the specific needs of high school students and teachers is also evident in the reviews they do on the currently available resources. Many teachers use these as a basis for text selection. This is another problem that exists presently. The reviews published by the American Psychological Association are a good example. In a recent edition of such reviews all but one of the reviews was done from the college level. In these reviews many of the comments made showed a lack of understanding of the needs and constraints on the secondary level. For instance, the estimate of the amount of material which could be covered in a year or semester course was most often sadly

inaccurate, as experienced high school teachers would attest. The assessment of what would appeal to the high school reader was also frequently off target, as were many opinions on feasibility of activities suggested in many sources.

In general, the types of materials still needed at the secondary level are comprehensive textbooks and supplementary materials, including teacher resource books, ditto masters of tests and activities, audio-visual material (of good quality), experimental designs and simulations. While much new material is being produced at the present time it often fails to address the specialized needs of students and teachers at this specific level. Increased input from educators experienced at the high school level is still needed.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Kasschau, R. and M. Wertheimer, Teaching Psychology in Secondary Schools (Washington, D.C. : American Psychological Association, 1974)